

Logistics Impact of Interdiction Operations
in South Laos

25X1 13 Oct 70 [] (DDO/FE) to DDP memo re Dr. Kissinger's Request
for an Evaluation of the South Laos Interdiction
Program (requesting CIA's best estimate of the amounts
of supplies which have been interdicted)

25X1 No Date [] re South Laos interdiction program (clash/casualty
statistics, Sekong River interdiction program, booty
captured or destroyed, qualitative results)

15 Oct 70 Karamessines to Kissinger memo re Logistics Impact of
Interdiction Operations in South Laos

. Attachment: Typescript IM (S-3388) IM re Logistics
Impact of Interdiction Operations in
South Laos During the 1970 Wet Season

USAF review(s) completed.

ARMY review(s) completed.

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13 OCT 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Plans

SUBJECT : Dr. Kissinger's Request for an Evaluation of the South Laos Interdiction Program

25X1 1. [] informed me this morning that Dr.
25X1 Kissinger had been reviewing our South Laos Interdiction Reports. He then asked [] to get an evaluation from CIA of the effectiveness of the interdiction program in harassing the communist supply lines in the Panhandle. Specifically Kissinger wants to have our best estimate of the amounts of supplies which have been interdicted.

25X1 2. [] Chief, OER, has agreed to help us
25X1 prepare a reply to Dr. Kissinger. We will ask the Station for its assessment and provide this to [] tomorrow morning. [] asked for the paper by tomorrow, and, hopefully, we will be able to get it to him before the close of business Wednesday.

25X1 []
Acting Chief, Far East Division

Distribution:

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13 OCT 1970

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15 OCT 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Logistics Impact of Interdiction
Operations in South Laos

1. The attached memorandum is in response to [redacted] request that you wish to be informed of the amount of supplies destroyed or captured as a result of the interdiction operations in South Laos during the 1970 wet season.

2. In view of your interest in what was going on with the enemy's logistics system during the period of these operations, I am also attaching a recent publication by this Agency which discusses logistical developments in South Laos and Cambodia during the 1970 wet season.

/s/

THOMAS H. KARAMESSINES
Deputy Director for Plans

Attachments: (2)

1. Intelligence Memorandum, "Logistics Impact of Interdiction Operations in South Laos During the 1970 Wet Season," 15 Oct 70 [redacted]
2. ER IM 70-147, "Communist Logistical Developments in Southern Laos and Cambodia During the 1970 Wet Season," Oct 70 ([redacted] (Copy No. 170))

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Approved For Release 2007/10/23 : CIA-RDP78T02095R000600230001-7

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
15 October 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Logistics Impact of Interdiction
Operations in South Laos
During the 1970 Wet Season

Background

1. Allied interdiction operations against the NVA logistics system in South Laos during the 1970 wet season consisted principally of the 7AF Commando Hunt IV program and limited ground interdiction efforts by friendly guerrilla forces in Operation Gauntlet and MACSOG units carrying out Prairie Fire operations.

2. The impact of the 1970 wet season interdiction operations, in terms of supplies destroyed, was small. This result was to be expected both because of the reduced level of logistical activity during the wet season and the environmental restraints imposed on our interdiction operations. The effect of the wet season interdiction programs is, in fact, more properly measured by assessing the extent to which they complicated the enemy's attempts to keep the system in a state of readiness for the resumption of dry season operations; increased the cost and difficulties of moving even small amounts of supplies; forced the diversion of large numbers of personnel to maintain and defend the system in South Laos; and obstructed plans for the westward expansion of the system.

3. A primary reason for not anticipating a large pay-off in terms of the destruction of supplies is the meager nature of the target system, particularly during the wet season. During the 1969 wet season, for example, the 559th Transportation Group pulled out of South Laos and the actual movement of supplies was restricted to the movement of small amounts in the area around the DMZ and shuttling activities in the central Panhandle. During the

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1970 wet season the 559th remained in South Laos. But the amounts of supplies moved through the system were small, apparently adequate to maintain the forces in the Panhandle but not enough to provide a significant volume for throughput to Cambodia or South Vietnam.

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By September concern about moving supplies became minimal and the operations of the 559th concentrated almost exclusively on the completion of final preparations for the opening of the 1970-71 dry season.

4. Other factors that limited the pay-off from interdiction operations were the sharp reductions in Air Force sorties, the influence of weather on both ground and air operations, the launching of ground operations during the period when traffic flows were at their lowest point of the year, and, finally, the hostile environment which caused many ground operations to be short-lived.

Air Interdiction

5. 7AF interdiction operations -- Commando Hunt IV -- were reduced significantly during the 1970 wet season. Only 14,400 tactical attack sorties were flown in southern Laos this summer (June-September) compared with 29,500 sorties for the same four months last year. The decrease in tactical attack sorties was partly offset, however, by the greater number of B-52 strikes which more than doubled, increasing from 1,100 last year to 2,400 this year.

6. The results of these air operations are difficult to assess in a quantitative sense. This is because the data on bombing results, principally pilot reports, and the condition under which they must be reported make them almost inevitably subject to wide margins of error. In addition, the methodologies currently used to convert BDA results to supply losses involve a number of questionable, though necessarily arbitrary, assumptions yielding results which are at odds with other intelligence. Despite these limitations which preclude any precise weighing of supplies lost because of air interdiction, a number of related factors support a judgment that the amounts lost during this wet season were undoubtedly small.

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7. The data reported by 7AF, for example, indicate that truck destruction during this wet season increased by about 25 percent compared to the 1969 wet season when truck traffic was inordinately low. At the same time, the data show that secondary explosions and fires, the category which traditionally accounts for the bulk of estimated losses, decreased by 25 percent.

8. A better appreciation of the magnitude of supply losses due to air interdiction can be had by comparing BDA data for this wet season with similar data for the previous dry season. Thus, effective truck losses averaged 4 a day during this wet season, compared with losses of 24 trucks a day during the previous dry season. Similarly, the average of 47 secondary fires and explosions for this wet season compares with an average of 200 a day reported during the past dry season.

Ground Interdiction

9. During the past wet season, two programs -- Operation Gauntlet and Prairie Fire -- involved the use of friendly ground forces in interdiction operations in South Laos. Neither of these programs resulted in the destruction of large amounts of supplies.

Prairie Fire

10. The commitment of Prairie Fire resources to ground interdiction operations during the 1970 wet season was minimal. During the period June-September, an average of 30-35 Prairie Fire operations were conducted monthly in South Laos. About 90% of these operations were oriented primarily toward reconnaissance activities. A number of operational handicaps, particularly the vigorous reactions of enemy forces, meant that these FGU missions were usually short-lived. Only a handful of these operations yielded any significant information on enemy logistics or gained access to enemy installations that were not long abandoned. In the few cases where the probes were relatively lucrative, the amounts of enemy supplies captured or destroyed were quite small. A typical example is represented by an operation in late September south of the western corner of the DMZ. This operation unearthed an ammunition cache

in a bomb-damaged bunker. The cache contained 3,800 rounds of 30 cal., 500 rounds of 50 cal., and nine rounds of 57 mm recoilless rifle ammunition -- a total of some 350 pounds of ammunition.

11. The most lucrative of the Prairie Fire interdiction operations during the 1970 wet season was Operation Tailwind, a three-day long reconnaissance-in-force operation carried out some 15 miles west of Chavane. Operation Tailwind was launched on 11 September when three platoons, totaling 136 troops were inserted by helicopter into an area near enemy Route 165/966 close to the Binh Tram 36 area of operations. Although met with almost continuous enemy harassment, the heavy application of close air support sustained the operation's momentum and allowed the force to enter several enemy installations (presumably on the outer periphery of BT 36) before being exfiltrated on 14 September. Early into the mission, friendly troops captured and subsequently destroyed an ammunition cache containing an estimated 30 tons of supplies.* In addition, some 850 pages of enemy documents were seized and returned to MACV for analysis.** Allied losses sustained during the 80-hour duration of Operation Tailwind were relatively moderate. Three troops were killed, and fifty were wounded (but only five required hospitalization). Estimates of enemy killed by air strikes numbered over 400. The operation was costly, however, in terms of helicopters. Two helicopters were shot down during extraction attempts. Another dozen helicopters were so heavily damaged by enemy fire as to be unserviceable.

Operation Gauntlet

12. Operation Gauntlet, the major ground interdiction program undertaken during this wet season, was launched

* Found in the cache were: 500 140mm. rockets, 300 82mm. rockets, 2,000 23mm. rounds, 12,500 rounds of small arms ammunition, and 40 bicycles.

** According to MACV reporting, these documents contain highly significant information on the 559th Transportation Group. As of 25 September, 400 pages of the documents had been classified Category A -- the highest rating for intelligence value.

on 29 August 1970 and concluded on 30 September. The Operation, including approximately 5,000 [] troops, had as its primary mission the interdiction and harassment of enemy lines of communication (LOC's) in Southern Laos, and the displacing of enemy units deployed along the eastern rim of the Bolovens Plateau overlooking the Se Kong River and Route 16. Given this mission, the interdiction operations of Operation Gauntlet cannot be evaluated primarily in terms of the amounts of supplies destroyed and captured.

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13. Another factor which drastically limited any potential pay-off from Operation Gauntlet in terms of supplies destroyed was the fact that it took place at the height of the wet season when supply movements through the Panhandle were at the lowest level of the year.

14. The quantity of supplies captured or destroyed by Operation Gauntlet forces was small -- some 23 short tons of rice and little more than 1 ton of weapons and ammunition.* The loss of these supplies will be of little consequence to the enemy. Three Communist LOC's were also temporarily interdicted during the Operation, Route 23 at Ban Toumlan, the Se Bang Hieng River well west of Route 23 and Routes 96-165 in the Chavane area. These interdictions probably had a marginal effect on supply movement since, as stated above, the level of logistic activity in these areas and throughout the Panhandle was at an extremely low level.

15. Gauntlet forces have also had some additional success in destroying enemy supplies by calling in air strikes against enemy facilities. One of the more dramatic examples of this activity was an air strike which resulted in 20 large secondary explosions and 200 smaller secondary explosions. It is probable that the ground-air cooperative ventures of this type result in much greater destruction of supplies than does ground action alone.

16. Although the effects of Operation Gauntlet have been slight in terms of the capture or destruction of

* An itemized listing is contained in the Appendix.

enemy supplies, the program has had a measure of success in other respects. It was a contributing factor to the developments which forced the North Vietnamese to make a number of troop deployments to improve their tactical position in South Laos.

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17. The successful retaking of Phou Nong Tao and PS-26 by Gauntlet forces also has had a significant impact on the enemy's logistic capabilities. The holding of these positions has denied the enemy free access to Route 16 and the Se Kong river, critical areas which he must control before the westward expansion of his logistical system can be completed. Extensive seeding of mines along Routes 23 and 16 will also complicate the enemy's use of these routes.

18. Operation Gauntlet has also met with some success in its harassment of enemy forces. Gauntlet forces reportedly killed some 600 enemy troops and wounded another 500. Inflicting these casualties was not without its own high costs because Gauntlet forces suffered 147 killed-in-action and 677 wounded-in-action. More importantly, Gauntlet casualties account for a significantly higher share of manpower resources than do enemy casualties.

19. Phase II of the South Laos interdiction program which is to be launched on October 20th offers some prospects of significantly greater success in terms of the destruction of enemy supplies. Phase II will place [] forces along those north-south routes in South Laos which are major channels for the movement of supplies. It will also be taking place during the

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period when the enemy will have started his dry season logistic campaign and supply movements should be at high levels. It should be noted, however, that the [redacted] forces will be operating in areas critical to the enemy. Consequently, they will be vigorously defended and the casualties sustained by [redacted] forces will undoubtedly be much greater than they were during Operation Gauntlet.

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APPENDIX

Weapons and Ammunition Captured in
Operation Gauntlet

<u>Weapons</u>	<u>Unit</u>
60 mm mortar	3
RPG-2	14
RPD machine gun	4
AK-47	36
Recoilless gun	2
SKS	2
M1	1
Bren gun	1
Pistol	1

<u>Ammunition</u>	<u>Units</u>
57 mm recoilless	45 rounds
30 caliber	4 cases
60 mm mortar	54 rounds
82 mm mortar	9 rounds
B-40 rocket	51 rounds
RPD ammunition	1,500 rounds
Hand grenades	17
AK-47 ammunition	4,130 rounds

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